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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER - OAS HEMISPHERIC SECURITY MINISTERIAL

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The American Embassy in Mexico City welcomes your upcoming visits. The October 6-8 OAS Hemispheric Security Ministerial is taking place at a time in Mexico when law enforcement and security issues are occupying a prominent place in the country's national agenda as never before. We expect GOM representatives will use the encounter to highlight their government's initiatives to improve public security in Mexico. Your interventions during the Ministerial, and private conversations with senior Mexican law enforcement officials, will serve to provide some much-needed moral support to an ally at a critical juncture.

¶2. (SBU) Public concern over crime and violence, reflected by increased tension among Mexico's principal political groups, has greatly increased in recent weeks. In the wake of a high-profile kidnap case in August, and the vicious grenade attacks on a Michoacan crowd celebrating Mexico's Independence Day, a perception is growing that Mexico's already troubled security situation has deteriorated suddenly and disturbingly. Seeking advantage in the run up to elections next year, Mexico's opposition political parties are beginning to distance themselves from the President, claiming his crime fighting strategy has been ineffectual to date.

¶3. (U) Ironically, the increased pressure on President Calderon comes at a time when many of the pieces of his strategy are beginning to fall into place. Since taking office, the president has launched anti-drug operations in more than ten states, raised pay for the military, and replaced numerous high-ranking federal police officers.

¶4. (U) In the past year, these initiatives have contributed to genuine success. Combined military and law enforcement operations have resulted in the takedown of nearly ten senior members of Mexico's notorious cartels, including Alfredo Beltran of the Arturo Beltran-Leyva Organization (formerly part of the Sinaloa group). In all, more than 17,000 persons involved in drug related crimes have been arrested. In the calendar year to date, approximately 11 metric tons of cocaine have been seized, as well as approximately 750,000 kilos of marijuana and 160 kilos of methamphetamine. Last year was a boom year for seizures as well -- over 48 metric tons, including a world record 23.5 metric ton bust in October 2007.

¶5. (U) President Calderon also initiated sweeping structural and operational reforms among police elements, successfully advanced legislation unifying federal police forces and in June, signed legislation to reform the criminal justice system. Such wide-reaching actions and enhancements will

take time to fully implement, but will considerably strengthen GOM security capabilities across-the-board.

¶6. (SBU) In the meantime, Mexico's president needs our strong support. As you know, Merida Initiative funding was passed by our Congress and signed into law by the President in June. We are finalizing a letter of agreement with the Mexican government on Merida programs. GOM representatives have signaled their desire for speedy deployment of Merida programs and equipment.

¶7. (SBU) Publicly, you can stress our commitment to moving forward quickly. Privately, you can assure your law enforcement contacts here that we are already priming the many USG agencies involved in advancing Merida and will begin implementing as soon as we have congressional approval and agreement with the GOM. Please explain that procurement and disbursement of equipment is a complex, time-consuming process. Urge them to work together collegially and defuse public speculation regarding divisions in the Mexican National Security Cabinet.

¶8. (Unclassified Entire Section) Public Support

The OAS Security Ministerial is an opportunity to provide President Calderon the strong public support he needs during this period. In your interventions, you can underscore our support for President Calderon's counter crime strategy by:

--Noting the successes President Calderon has achieved to date.

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--Supporting his efforts to reform Mexico's security forces and criminal justice system.

--Acknowledging our shared responsibility to combat the illegal narcotics trade, stressing our commitment, and ongoing efforts, to stem the flow of illegal arms into Mexico, combat money laundering and reduce demand for narcotics in the United States.

--Noting the contribution the Merida Initiative will make to the considerable resources Mexico is already putting into its war on organized crime, and the regional benefits of cross-border cooperation against cross-border criminal networks.

¶9. (U) Please let me know if there is anything I and my staff can do to advance the goals of your visits here. We look forward to your arrival.
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